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NEWLY made in the SOUTH SEAS, by ANSON, BYRON, WALLIS, BOUAINVILLE, COOK, and other celebrated CIRCUMNAVIGATORS; Illustrated with a variety of useful PROJECTIONS and REPRESENTATIONS of the HEAVENLY BODIES: the most approved ASTRONOMICAL and GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS: With an easy and familiar Explanation of the most curious and interesting PHENOMENA in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM.



# Undemarcated Borders and Incidents of Violent Conflict in Central Asia

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Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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## **Undemarcated Borders and Incidents of Violent Conflict in Central Asia**

A series of violent incidents on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders in 2013-2015 have drawn increased attention to the issue of undemarcated borders in Central Asia. Sources in and outside the region clearly document how undemarcated borders in Central Asia are a serious security issue, particularly when violent conflict takes place in disputed borders areas. One overlooked aspect of the violence has been local news reports that reveal a more nuanced and detailed perspective of the circumstances and aftermath of the incidents as well as the few efforts by government officials and officers from the security forces on both sides of the border to resolve the disputes. An examination of the incidents of violent conflict on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders from sources in the region is an important part of understanding how undemarcated borders in Central Asia will continue to be a security issue.

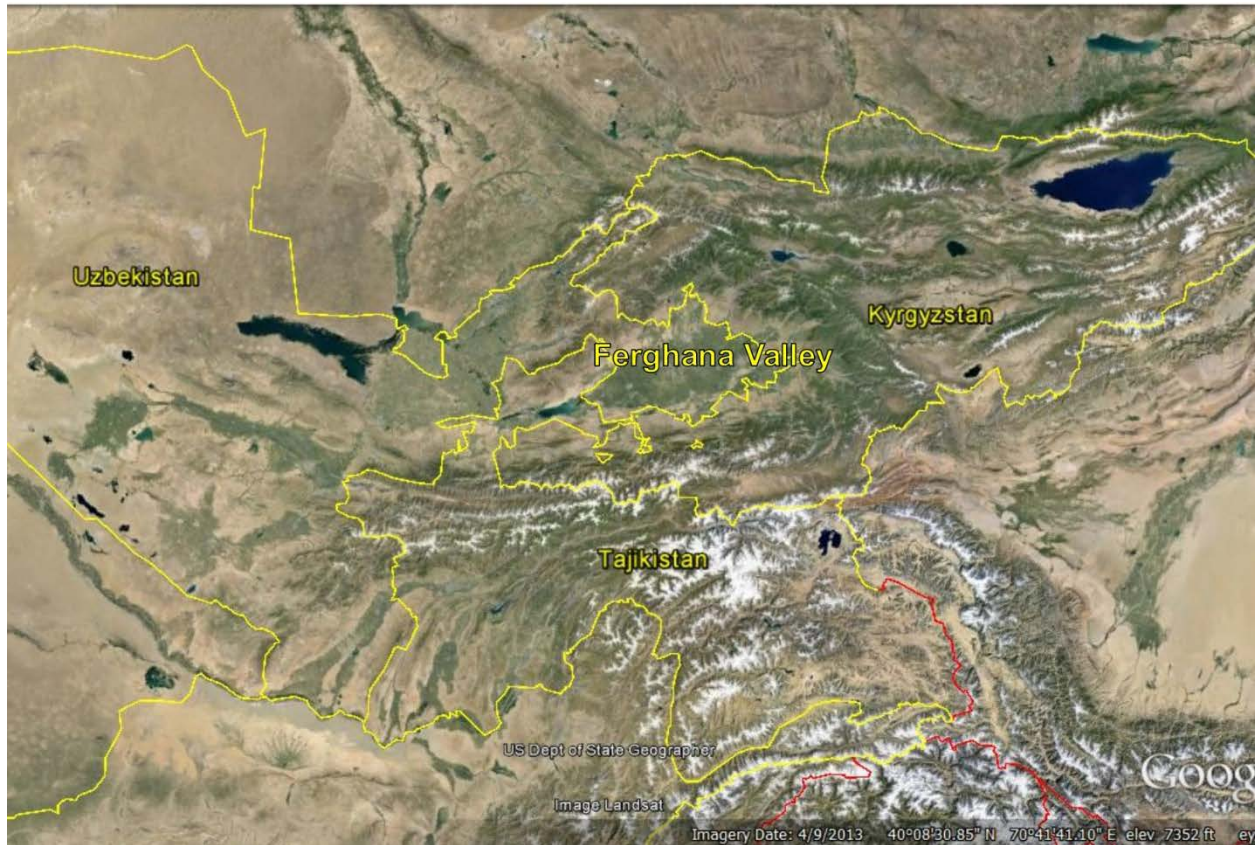
### **Background**

There have been a number of studies and articles in various media which have looked at the undemarcated borders of the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>1</sup> These studies have examined undemarcated borders that the Central Asian states have with each other as well as with other states that border the region, in particular Russia and China. While all undemarcated borders in Central Asia are a problem and some have the potential to be areas where violence could take place, sections of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders in the Ferghana Valley region have proven to be the most contentious.

Specific areas of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders are unique because of the enclaves of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the Batken Oblast in southern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>2</sup> The Batken Oblast is the location of several enclaves of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, but the violent incidents in 2013-2014 took place near the Sokh (Uzbekistan) and Vorukh (Tajikistan) enclaves, with the latter being the border area where most of the incidents took place. The history of enclaves in the Batken Oblast and the borders of the Ferghana Valley region is complex and dates back to the border demarcation of the then Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik Soviet Republics in the 1920s, and then redrawn in the 1950s and in 1989.<sup>3</sup>

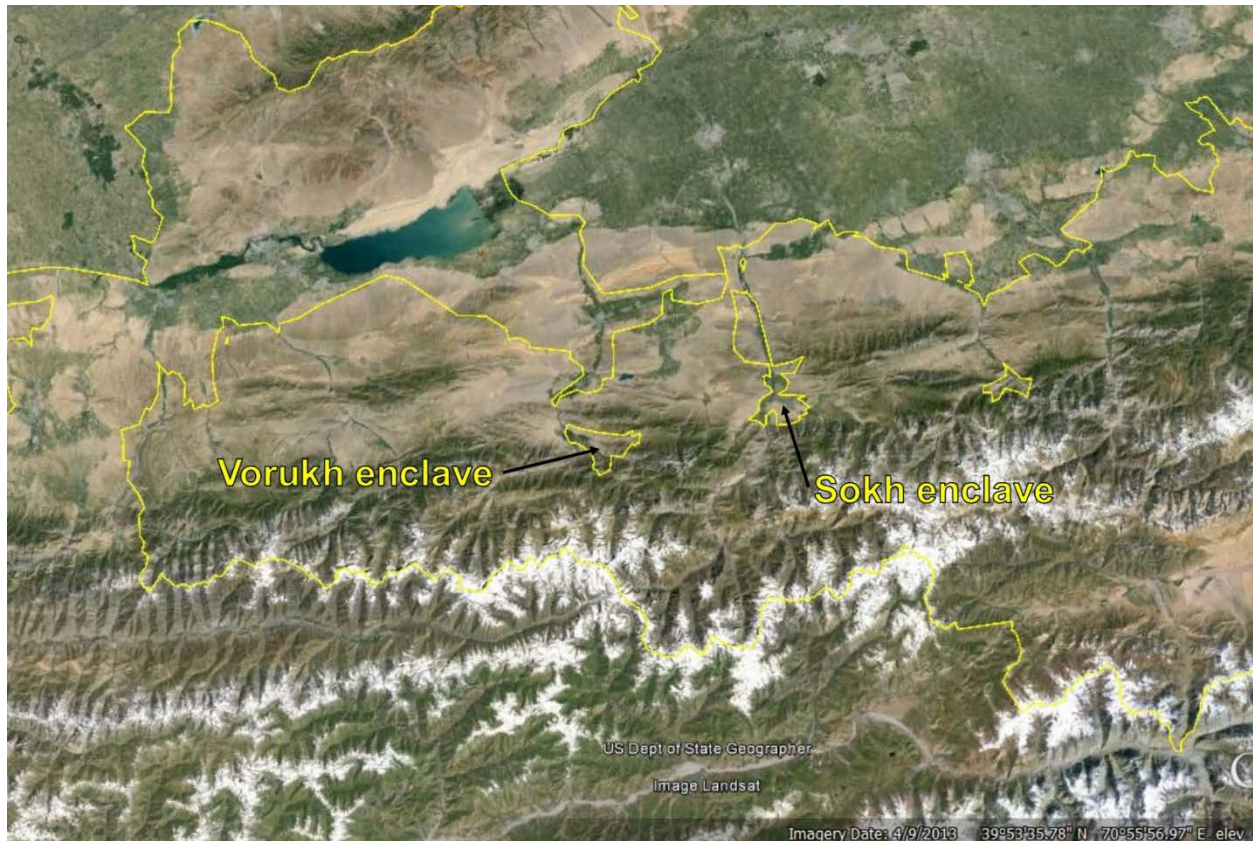
The maps produced during these different periods are one of the main reasons why the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not been able to fully demarcate their shared border and why it continues to be disputed. Kyrgyzstan believes the map from the 1950s is legally binding, while Tajikistan references the 1920s map. Both governments have requested maps from Soviet archives in Moscow to aid them in negotiating a solution.<sup>4</sup> Negotiations between the two governments have been ongoing, though no solution has been reached as of May 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of any results from bilateral negotiations, it is important to look at the reasons behind the incidents of violent conflict on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders. Disputes over the borders have not led to sustained military action by any government, though border guards did use force during some of these incidents and both the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments reportedly moved various units close to the border following one incident. Instead, the violent incidents have often involved civilians and started as a result of disputes over infrastructure near the border.



**Map of the Ferghana Valley region**





### **The Vorukh (Tajikistan) and Sokh (Uzbekistan) enclaves**

### **The Incidents of Violent Conflict in 2013-2015**

#### *Kyrgyz-Uzbek border – Batken Oblast-Sokh enclave – January 5-7, 2013*

The east-west road that connects the western districts of Batken, Kyrgyzstan to the rest of country runs through Uzbekistan's Sokh enclave. On January 5, 2013 residents of the village of Khushyar, of Uzbekistan's Sokh enclave, became angry when Kyrgyz border guards placed several poles in the ground to supply electricity to a border post near the village of Charbak, Batken Oblast. Khushyar residents confronted the Kyrgyz border guards at the post and claimed that the poles were placed on the wrong side of the border. They then reportedly assaulted the

border guards, who fired warning shots in an attempt to disperse the crowd. Four people in the crowd were injured during the assault.

Khushyar residents later returned to the border post in larger numbers on January 6 and began removing the poles and destroying property as well as assaulting residents of Charbak, including kidnapping over a dozen people from the village and taking them to Khushyar as hostages. Khushyar residents kidnapped more citizens of Kyrgyzstan while they were driving through Sokh and caused damage to their vehicles and injured a policeman who attempted to intervene. In retaliation, Kyrgyz residents from Charbak took several hostages from Sokh. On January 7 the violence ended and authorities from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan negotiated the release of the hostages. The Kyrgyz-Uzbek border was closed for a few weeks following the incident.<sup>6</sup>

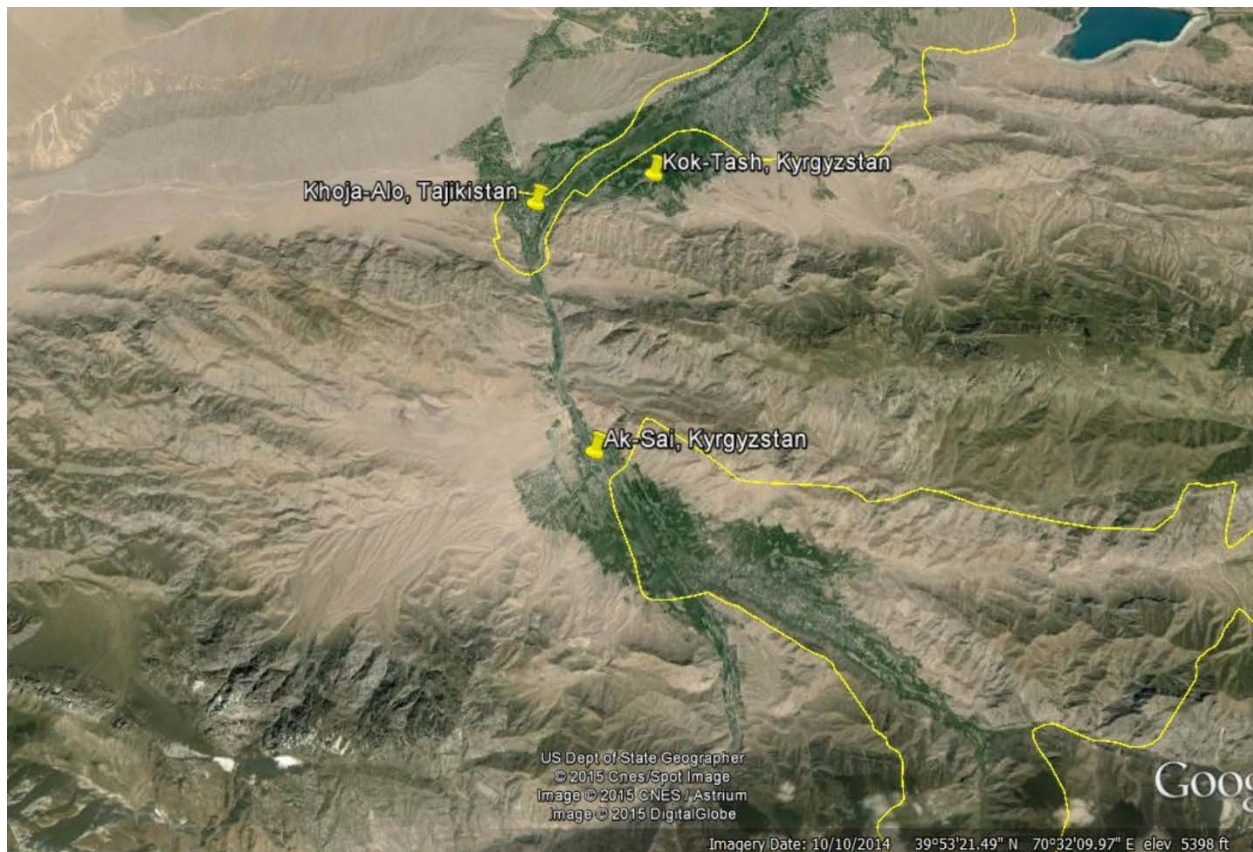


## **Map of Charbak (Kyrgyzstan) and Khushyar, Sokh (Uzbekistan)**

*Kyrgyz-Tajik border – Batken Oblast-Vorukh enclave – April 27, 2013*

On April 27, 2013 residents of Ak-Sai, a village in Kyrgyzstan's Batken Oblast, and Tajikistan's Vorukh enclave fought over the construction of a road near the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. The road would allow passage to Ak-Sai without having to enter Tajikistan. Prior to the incident, road construction had been on hold for several days because of the dispute of its location as residents of Vorukh have claimed that construction was taking place on Tajik territory. Construction resumed on the morning of April 27 and caused the incident. An estimated 30-50 people took part in the violence, which resulted in damage to construction equipment, several injuries to civilians and policemen, as well as reports that over a dozen people from Tajikistan were temporarily taken hostage. In addition to this, civilians on both sides set up road blocks, which remained in place until April 28 when order was restored by security forces from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.<sup>7</sup>





### Map of Ak-Sai and Kok-Tash, Kyrgyzstan and Khoja-Alo, Tajikistan

*Kyrgyz-Tajik border – Batken Oblast-Khoja-Alo (Sughd Oblast, Tajikistan) – January 11, 2014*

On January 11, 2014 a clash took place between the border guards of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan over the latter's continued construction of the Kok-Tash – Ak-Sai – Tamdyk road which was the source of tension in the April 2013 incident. Tajik authorities and residents of Khoja-Alo continued to believe the construction was taking place on Tajik territory. There had also been tension between residents on both sides of the border a few weeks prior to January 11 over a case of arson and the border had been closed for a few days. Additionally, negotiations to demarcate the Kyrgyz-Tajik had taken place in Dushanbe on January 7-9, including an agreement to conduct joint patrols in the disputed border areas. The Kyrgyz border guards held a

press conference following the incident and showed a map made in Google Earth of where they believe the border is, the positions where Tajik forces attacked them from, and where the road the government is constructing runs.<sup>8</sup>

The clash started in the early afternoon of January 11 when an argument broke out between Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards over the road construction. Both sides claimed the other fired the first shots and during the clash, Tajik forces launched several mortars at Kyrgyz positions, which resulted in shrapnel wounds to Kyrgyz border guards.<sup>9</sup> Overall, the clash resulted in injuries to five Kyrgyz and two Tajik border guards. Both sides moved in reinforcements from their respective Ministries of Defense to the border in the days following the clash, then withdrew these units by the end of January. Kyrgyzstan delayed construction of the road immediately following the incident, but later continued as officials had during previous incidents. Negotiations between local authorities and senior officers from both sides took place in the Batken and Sughd Oblasts for a few days following the incident, though the border remained closed until March 31.<sup>10</sup>

*Kyrgyz-Tajik border – Isfara District (Sughd Province)-Batken Province (Kyrgyzstan) – May 7-8, 2014*

On the evening of May 7, 2014 a clash took place between residents on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border near the villages of Zhaka Oruk and Kok-Terek, Kyrgyzstan and Khoja-Alo, Tajikistan. The clash started in the evening of May 7 when residents from the villages accused each other of vandalizing vehicles traveling in the border area. The accusations turned into violence when a few dozen people from area villages began throwing rocks at each other. Security forces from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan restored order after several hours on the morning of May 8, though a

gas station and other property near Kok-Terek were damaged in a fire. The clash resulted in injuries to several Kyrgyz and Tajik civilians and security forces.<sup>11</sup>

*Kyrgyz-Tajik border – Batken Oblast-Vorukh enclave – July 10, 2014*

On July 10, 2014 a clash between the border guards of Kyrgyzstan and Tajik civilians and subsequently the border guards of Tajikistan took place near the Kyrgyz Tamdyk border post. The incident started when around 30 civilian residents from Vorukh got into an argument with Kyrgyz border guards over placement of a water pipe from a river in Kyrgyz territory to a village in Vorukh. The Kyrgyz border guards claimed the civilians grew hostile and threw stones at them, forcing them to fire warning shots. Tajik border guards claimed they were fired on by their Kyrgyz counterparts not long after they had arrived on the scene during the argument. They also claimed they were there to protect civilians and that they did not return fire. Several people were injured, including two Tajik border guards. One Tajik civilian was killed. All injuries were from gunshot wounds. One Kyrgyz border guard was reported injured.

The Kyrgyz government claimed that Tajiks forces fired mortars on the Tamdyk border post on the evening of July 10. Government officials from both countries met on July 11 in the Sughd Province, Tajikistan. Tajik officials requested the removal of the Tamdyk border post, claiming that Tajik civilians have repeatedly threatened to attack the post and the Tajik government would not be held responsible for their actions. Authorities at the district and village level also met in July on the border to coordinate efforts on resolving the situation. The border was closed for two days following the incident.<sup>12</sup>



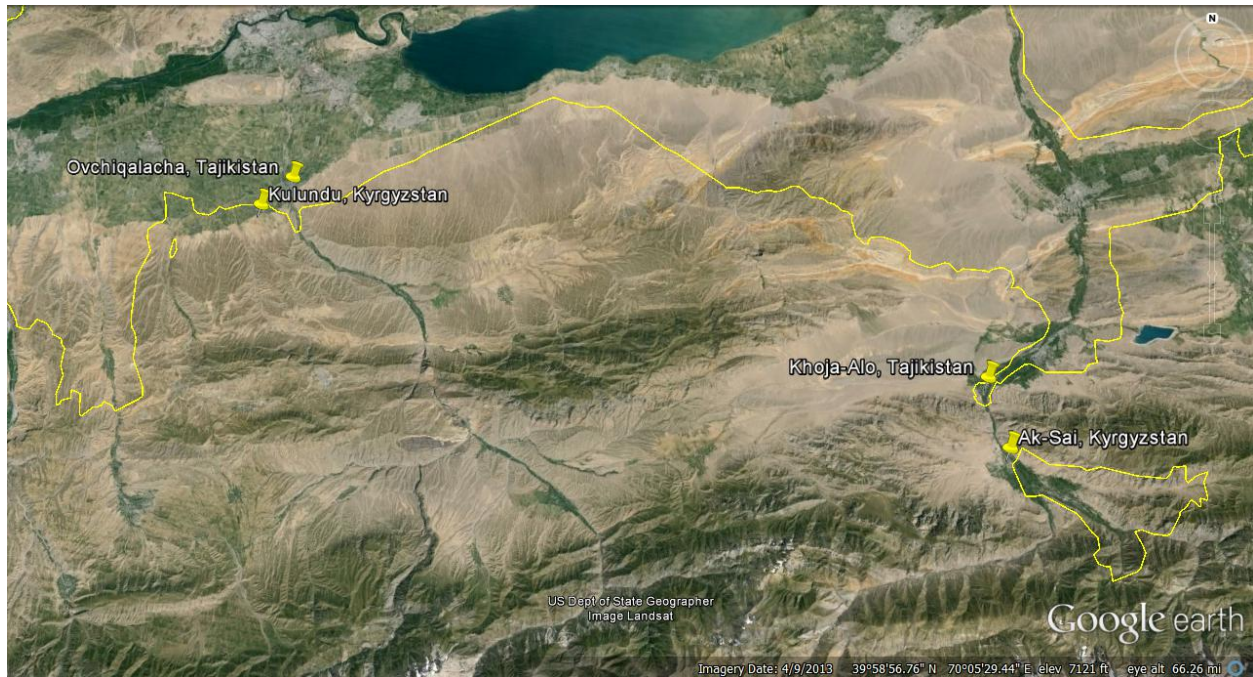


## Map of Tamdyk, Kyrgyzstan

*Kyrgyz-Tajik border – Ovchikalacha (Ghafurov District, Sughd Oblast) – August 25, 2014*

On August 25 a clash between the border guards of Kyrgyzstan and the border guards of Tajikistan and Tajik civilians took place on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border near the town of Ovchikalacha, Tajikistan. The incident started when Tajik civilians attempted to remove a Kyrgyz bridge over the Gulkandoz River with an excavator. Construction of the bridge had been planned for several weeks and was nearing completion at the time of the incident. Border guards from Kyrgyzstan claimed that when they attempted to prevent destruction of the bridge, Tajik civilians threw rocks at them, and then border guards from Tajikistan opened fire with mortars. Tajik officials denied that their border guards opened fire first. Several people from

Ovchiqalacha were wounded and two were killed, including the commander of the Tajik border post. There were no reported Kyrgyz casualties. Prior to the clash, border guards from Tajikistan reportedly established a border post Kyrgyzstan's territory.<sup>13</sup>



**Map of Ovchiqalacha, Tajikistan and Kulundu, Kyrgyzstan**

### **Other Incidents of Violence in the Border Regions from 2013-2015**

There have been other notable violent incidents on the Kyrgyz-Tajik and Kyrgyz-Uzbek borders from 2013-2015, including border guards firing on civilians during illegal border crossings. An examination of news reports during this period shows that there are several incidents a year in which the border guards of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan opened fire on civilians, some of whom had been crossing the border illegally or were involved in smuggling. These shooting incidents sometimes result in injuries or death.<sup>14</sup> It is certainly possible that there are more shootings on the border than what appears in news reports, but not

all of the shooting incidents take place on a disputed section of the border like the incidents listed in the previous section.

There were a few other high-profile incidents on the borders of the Ferghana Valley during this period of time. On July 23, 2013 an altercation took place between the border guards of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the Aksy District, Jalal-Abad Oblast, when each side claimed the other had entered their territory and refused to leave. Both sides claimed the other opened fire first, though two Uzbek border guards were killed and no Kyrgyz border guards were injured.<sup>15</sup>

On August 20, 2013 a Tajik family of four was found murdered in their home in the town of Chorku, Sughd Oblast, Tajikistan.<sup>16</sup> Chorku is located near the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, approximately seven miles northeast of the town of Ak-Sai, Kyrgyzstan. On January 16, 2015 Kyrgyzstan's Border Guards reported an attack on the Aykol outpost, Leylek District, Batken Oblast that resulted in one officer being killed and two border guards injured from gunshot wounds. A member of the Kyrgyz border guards later confessed to the shooting.<sup>17</sup> The Aykol outpost is not located on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, but in a mountainous area in the central part of the Leylek District.

On September 20, 2013 a group of Uzbek border guards landed from a helicopter and took control of a radio tower located in the Aksy District (Jalal-Abad Oblast, Kyrgyzstan) and claimed the tower was on Uzbek territory. The Uzbek border guards withdrew on October 2 after government officials on both sides negotiated an agreement.<sup>18</sup> On December 18, 2013 residents on both sides of the border near the village of Ak-Sai blocked the road into the Vorukh for five days. The road block took place a day after a café in Ak-Sai was burned. Local residents blamed on Tajiks.<sup>19</sup> No one was reported killed or injured in either of these incidents.



## **Other considerations and efforts to solve the problem**

There are a number of regional and international organizations that focus on or include an effort to improve border security in Central Asia. These organizations include: the Border Management Programme in Central Asia, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre, the Council of Commanders of Border Troops, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.<sup>20</sup> While these organizations work jointly on improving border security in the region, they do not include a specific effort or charter toward demarcating disputed borders. Instead, the Central Asian governments have only conducted bilateral negotiations addressing those segments of undemarcated borders where trouble occurs.<sup>21</sup> This is not likely to change given the history of negotiations to date.

It is also worth noting that in October 2014 the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan passed laws to allow civilians to assist their respective border guards services with patrolling the border. The legislation called for civilians to patrol remote areas of the border on horseback with radios and minimal equipment. While there were reports that they would be armed, this could not be confirmed.<sup>22</sup> There have been no reports of a civilian border patrol involved in any violence near the border.

Violent conflicts on Central Asian borders are not limited to the Ferghana Valley region. Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan has been the site of numerous incidents of violence, but it is not related to disputes over infrastructure or because the border is undemarcated. Instead, it is often connected to the drug trade coming out of Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> There was also a notable incident of four Tajik border guards taken captive by unknown group on December 19, 2014 when they were gathering firewood on the one small islands in the Amu Darya, the river that separates Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The four are still being held in Afghanistan as of June 2015.<sup>24</sup> There

have also been concerns in Tajikistan, and from all of the Central Asian governments, about instability from Afghanistan spreading across the border and they have conducted joint military exercises to prepare for this.<sup>25</sup> These concerns increased in the spring of 2015 when the Taliban started an offensive in the Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, to which the government of Tajikistan responded by reinforcing sections of the Tajik-Afghan border.<sup>26</sup>

Outside of ongoing bilateral negotiations to demarcate the borders, there have been efforts to alleviate tension in the communities on both sides of the border. The Kyrgyz and Tajik government cooperated on road construction in the border region in September 2014.<sup>27</sup> In addition to this, in March 2015 the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments completed joint construction of a bridge to allow Kyrgyz citizens access to the village of Kulundu without having to enter Tajik territory. Kulundu is near the site of the August 2014 incident.<sup>28</sup> There was also a soccer match played between border guard detachments of the Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan and the Isfara District, Tajikistan on October 25, 2014.<sup>29</sup>

### **Summary of the violent incidents and outlook**

Based on news reports from sources in the region, the majority of the violent incidents on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Tajik borders took place because of a dispute involving infrastructure, specifically when any infrastructure was in the process of being constructed. Incidents like the road blocks on December 18, 2013 or the clash between civilians on May 7-8, 2014 near the Vorukh enclave may not have started directly because of infrastructure, but they were the result of local tension that most likely stemmed from the disputes. There are certainly just as many incidents of border guards opening fire on civilians during this period of time, but based on local media reports, these are not always attributed to the issue of undemarcated

borders. Local media also gave the most coverage to the violent incidents that involved infrastructure, so it is not often possible to verify if a shooting was related to undemarcated borders or if it involved civilians in an illegal border crossing or smuggling.

There was more media coverage of the violent incidents available from sources in Kyrgyzstan than Tajikistan, though the latter provided sufficient coverage of all the incidents. *Turmush*, a news source from Kyrgyzstan, included a couple of detailed maps of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border near Ak-Sai and the Vorukh enclave which cannot be found in any other sources. While media in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had their own biases in coverage of the incidents, they still provided the best insight. The Kyrgyz-Tajik border near the Vorukh enclave was the site of most of the violent incidents that took place. There were additional factors involved in the dispute, but Kyrgyzstan's construction of the Kok-Tash – Ak-Sai – Tamdyk road in 2013-2014 was central among these, particularly when construction continued after each of the incidents. Officials in Kyrgyzstan delayed construction a few times during this period, but the decision to continue led to more tension and violence, particularly in January, May and August 2014.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of reports in the media is how officers and government officials from both sides met and discussed the situation soon after an incident took place. These were separate meetings from the ongoing bilateral negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to demarcate the border. The meetings between Kyrgyz and Tajik officers on January 14, 2014 and July 11, 2014 were significant because they took place shortly after both sides had used force against each other, resulting in injuries to several border guards. The January 14 meeting and the joint patrols had only a temporary effect, since an additional violent incident took place near Vorukh on July 10. The violence on the border near Ovchikalacha in



August 2014 was not connected to the others, since it is located over 40 miles from the Vorukh enclave.

Other efforts by the government should also be noted. The cooperation on road construction in the border region in September 2014 appears to have provided one solution. There was also the joint construction of a bridge near Ovchikalacha in March 2015 and a soccer match in October 2014, though the latter may have been for public relations purposes. In any case, there has not been an incident near the Vorukh enclave since July 2014 or any violence directly related to an undemarcated border or dispute over infrastructure near the border.

This does not necessarily mean that the border issues are resolved. Sources in Tajikistan noted how tension has existed between communities on both sides of the border for some time. The construction of infrastructure in 2013-2015 near a disputed border was the spark that caused tension to turn violent. As of June 2015 the governments of Central Asia that share an undemarcated border do not appear to be any closer to resolving the issue than they were before any of these incidents happened. Negotiations between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular took place more frequently from 2013-2015 than in previous years, but they have yet to reach a significant agreement. The one area that they were able to cooperate on was the coordination of the road and bridge construction. This removes one of the sources of the violence, but other local efforts to alleviate tension will likely be a determining factor in any future violence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The list of studies and articles on undemarcated borders across the Central Asia region is extensive; some of the more comprehensive and recent works include: Vera Fedchina, *Как Создавалась Карта Средней Азии (How the map of Central Asia was created)* (Moscow: Academy of the Sciences, USSR, 1967); Necati Polat, *Boundary Issues in Central Asia* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2002); Nick Megoran, "Rethinking the Study of International Boundaries: A Biography of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Boundary," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, No. 2 (August 2011); International Crisis Group, "Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential," *Asia Report* 33, (April 4, 2002), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/033-central-asia-border-disputes-and-conflict-potential.aspx>, (accessed April 8, 2015); "Потенциал для мира и угрозы конфликтов (The potential for peace and the threat of conflicts)," UNDP in Tajikistan, July 2011, <http://www.undp.tj/files/Report%20in%20Russian.pdf>, (accessed April 8, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Nurali Davlat, "Неприветливая граница анклава (The unfriendly border enclave)," *Charhi Gardun*, June 13, 2013, <http://gazeta.tj/dp/7666-neprivetlivaya-granica-anklava.html>, (accessed June 9, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Polat, *Boundary Issues in Central Asia*; Megoran, "Rethinking the Study of International Boundaries: A Biography of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Boundary,"; Maksim Vedeneev, "Ученые против топорного раздела ЦА. К вопросу о спорных территориях (Scholars against the clumsy division of Central Asia. The solution to the disputed territories)," *Centrasia.ru*, July 16, 2014, <http://www.centrasia.ru/news.php?st=1405502640>, (accessed April 17, 2015); "Потенциал для мира и угрозы конфликтов (The potential for peace and the threat of conflicts)," UNDP in Tajikistan.

<sup>4</sup> Khayrullo Mirsaidov, "Осадный Ворух (The Vorukh Siege)," *Asia-Plus*, May 2, 2013, <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/osadnyi-vorukh>, (accessed April 17, 2015); Ilkhom Kuliyeu, "Где должна пройти таджикско-кыргызская граница (Where the Tajik-Kyrgyz border should run)," *Asia-Plus*, January 16, 2014, <http://news.tj/ru/news/gde-dolzha-proiti-tadzhiksko-kyrgyzskaya-granitsa>, (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Avaz Yuldashev, "Таджикистан и Кыргызстан подписали план совместной работы по решению приграничных споров на 2015 год (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan signed a joint plan of work on solving the border disputes in the year 2015)," *Asia-Plus*, March 6, 2015, <http://news.tj/ru/news/tadzhikistan-i-kyrgyzstan-podpisali-plan-sovmestnoi-raboty-po-resheniyu-prigranichnykh-sporov-n>, (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Yekaterina Ivashchenko and Daniil Kislov, "Кыргызстан-Узбекистан: Десять столбов и шесть метров от границы (Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan: Ten posts and six meters from the border)," *Fergana News*, January 8, 2013, <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/7591>, (accessed April 23, 2015); "Противоправные действия кыргызских пограничников привели к обострению обстановки на границе – КОГГ СНБ (The unlawful actions of the Kyrgyz border guards led to the exacerbation of conditions on the border – The Border Guards Service of the SNB)," *12.uz*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.12.uz/#ru/news/show/official/12730/>, (accessed February 6, 2013); "Хроника кыргызской-узбекского пограничного инцидента в анклав Сох 5-я января 2013 года (The chronology of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border incident in the enclave of Sokh on January 5, 2013)," *AKI Press Osh*, January 10, 2013, <http://turmush.kg/ru/news:39615>, (accessed April 23, 2015); "В Баткенской области вновь открыт один из пограничных пунктов пропуска вблизи анклава Сох (One of the border crossing points near the enclave of Sokh in the Batken oblast has again been opened)," *K News*, February 2, 2013, <http://www.knews.kg/ru/action/27368/>, (accessed April 23, 2015).

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